



Formal Learning Still Dominates: A Qualitative Coding Analysis of Civil Servant Competence Development in Medan City Government

Adrian Saleh^{1*}, Tengku Irmayani², Husni Thamrin³

Corresponding Author's e-mail: salehdrian@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study analyzed the methods used to develop the competence of civil servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) at the Medan City Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) and their relationship to the performance of the Medan City Government. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data drawn from in-depth interviews with the Head of BKPSDM, the Head of the HR Development Division, eight BKPSDM staff, twenty ASN training participants, and three academics, supplemented by field observation and document review, and analyzed through inductive coding. The findings showed that competence development remains dominated by classroom training (22% of implementation codes), followed by blended learning and training administration (15% each), while coaching, mentoring, and digital learning are present but not yet systematically embedded. The intervention was perceived as effective mainly where training content matched job needs and participants stayed engaged, but post-training evaluation and monitoring, budget constraints, and partial misalignment between training content and position requirements remained persistent constraints. Organizational support particularly peer learning and digitalization helped offset these limitations. The study concludes that competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan is shifting gradually from a purely classroom-based model toward a more blended and digitally supported one, and recommends strengthening post-training evaluation, position-based training design, and organizational learning culture to translate competence gains into sustained government performance.

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¹ Master Program of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

² Master Program of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³ Master Program of Development Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Introduction

The performance of local government is inseparable from the quality of its civil servants (*Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN*), whose competence directly determines the effectiveness of public administration, bureaucratic responsiveness, and public service delivery. In the contemporary governance environment, public institutions are increasingly required to move beyond procedural compliance toward adaptive, accountable, digital, and citizen-oriented service systems. This shift has placed civil servant competence at the center of administrative reform because competent ASN are expected not only to understand formal regulations, but also to demonstrate technical expertise, managerial capability, socio-cultural sensitivity, digital literacy, and ethical public service behavior. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) emphasizes that the evolving role of public servants requires lifelong learning and continuous capability enhancement, because learning has become an integral part of public sector work rather than a one-time training activity.

The concept of competence has long been discussed in human resource management literature. Spencer and Spencer (1993) define competence as an underlying individual characteristic that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job. In the public sector, this concept is especially relevant because civil servants are expected to convert knowledge, skills, motives, values, and behavioral attributes into effective task execution and public service outcomes. In Indonesia, the competency framework for ASN is institutionally reflected in the categorization of managerial, socio-cultural, and technical competencies, which together form the basis for position requirements and civil servant development. More recently, Law No. 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus has strengthened the orientation of ASN management toward meritocracy, digitalization, and continuous competency development through an integrated learning system. Thus, ASN competency development should not be treated as a routine administrative obligation, but as a strategic instrument for building a professional, adaptive, and future-ready bureaucracy.

Theoretically, this study is also informed by the 70:20:10 learning and development framework proposed by Lombardo and Eichinger (1996). This framework explains that effective employee development is ideally supported by three complementary learning sources: approximately 70 percent from experiential learning, 20 percent from social learning, and 10 percent from formal learning. Although the numerical ratio should not be interpreted rigidly, the framework is useful for emphasizing that competence development cannot rely exclusively on classroom-based training. Contemporary workplace learning literature similarly confirms that informal learning, learning by doing, peer interaction, mentoring, coaching, job assignment, and knowledge sharing are critical for improving human capital and employee performance (De Grip, 2024; OECD, 2023). Therefore, a mature ASN competence development system should integrate formal training with workplace-based and socially embedded learning mechanisms.

Within job assignment, and knowledge sharing are this context, the Medan City Government, through the Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency (*Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia/BKPSDM*), has a strategic responsibility to plan, coordinate, implement, and evaluate ASN competence development. Medan Mayoral Regulation No. 49 of 2021 provides a local regulatory basis for strengthening ASN competence development in the city government. However, preliminary information indicates that implementation remains suboptimal. Competency development activities are still largely concentrated in formal learning programs

conducted separately by individual local government units, while social learning and experiential learning components remain comparatively underutilized. In addition, the implementation of Medan Mayoral Regulation No. 49 of 2021 has reportedly reached only around 30 percent, indicating persistent gaps in policy socialization, resource allocation, cross-unit coordination, digital learning infrastructure, and continuous monitoring.

This condition reveals an important administrative problem. On the one hand, the regulatory framework already requires ASN competence development to be systematic, continuous, and integrated with organizational needs. On the other hand, actual implementation at the local government level still tends to be fragmented, training-centered, and insufficiently connected to workplace learning. This gap is consequential because competence development that is not properly mapped, implemented, and evaluated may fail to produce measurable improvements in employee capability and organizational performance. Studies on public sector competency development show that employees often experience unequal access to learning opportunities, limited availability of relevant development programs, and dependence on leadership policy in accessing competence development (Prasojo et al., 2024). In Indonesia's digital transformation context, Silitonga (2023) also found that ASN digital literacy remains uneven and that regulation, intergenerational learning, and stronger digital skill development are important factors in closing the public sector digital skills gap.

As an alternative solution, ASN competence development in Medan City needs to move toward an integrated learning model that combines formal learning, social learning, experiential learning, and digital learning support. Formal training remains necessary, especially for regulatory, technical, and leadership competencies. However, it should be complemented by coaching, mentoring, peer learning, communities of practice, job rotation, special assignments, project-based learning, knowledge management, and in-house capacity building. Recent studies on digital skills development in Indonesia's public sector indicate that in-house capacity building, collaborative work culture, flexible working arrangements, and less hierarchical learning environments can strengthen public sector capability development (SMERU Research Institute, 2024). Therefore, BKPSDM Kota Medan needs to function not only as a training administrator, but also as a strategic learning architect that connects competency needs analysis, learning design, implementation, evaluation, and career development.

The state-of-the-art in public sector human resource development shows a growing shift from conventional training administration toward integrated competency development, learning culture, digital talent management, and workplace-based learning. At the national level, the emergence of ASN Corporate University and integrated learning systems reflects a broader policy direction that places learning closer to work processes and organizational performance needs. Nevertheless, existing studies on ASN competence development in local governments have mostly focused on policy implementation, training participation, leadership, or general competency improvement. Relatively few studies have examined how local governments operationalize the 70:20:10 logic in practice, how formal, social, and experiential learning are balanced, and how these learning methods contribute to the effectiveness of ASN competence development.

This study addresses that research gap by analyzing the methods used by the Medan City Government to develop ASN competence, assessing the effectiveness of those methods, and identifying the factors that support or constrain their implementation. The novelty of this study lies in its empirical focus on the transition from classroom-centered training toward a more integrated, digitally enabled, and socially embedded competence development model within a local government bureaucracy. Unlike prior studies that primarily examine competence as an individual attribute or

training as an administrative program, this study positions competence development as a systemic process involving policy design, institutional coordination, learning methods, resource readiness, leadership commitment, and workplace learning culture.

The urgency of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature on public sector human resource development by contextualizing the 70:20:10 framework in Indonesian local government and linking it with the current regulatory direction of integrated ASN learning. Practically, the study provides empirical evidence for BKPSDM Kota Medan and other local governments in designing competence development strategies that are more relevant, measurable, inclusive, and aligned with organizational performance needs. In the long term, a more effective ASN competence development system is expected to strengthen bureaucratic professionalism, improve public service quality, support digital government transformation, and enhance the capacity of local governments to respond to increasingly complex public demands.

Methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014), aimed at producing a systematic, factual, and accurate account of the methods, effectiveness, and constraints of ASN competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan, rather than testing statistical relationships between variables. The research was conducted at BKPSDM Kota Medan, the local government unit directly responsible for ASN personnel management and competence development policy.

Table 1. Research Informants by Category

Informant Category	Number of Informants
Head of BKPSDM Kota Medan	1
Head of the HR Development Division	1
BKPSDM staff	8
ASN training participants	20
Academics	3
Total	33

Source: reproduced from Saleh (2026, Table 3.1)

Primary data were collected through observation of training activities, technical workshops, and ASN daily work practices; in-depth semi-structured interviews; and documentation review of the agency's strategic plan, training reports, participant lists, training modules, and relevant local regulations. Secondary data were drawn from relevant published articles and institutional reports. Informants were selected purposively and comprised the Head of BKPSDM, the Head of the HR Development Division, eight BKPSDM staff directly involved in training administration, twenty ASN who had participated in competence development programs, and three academics able to comment on the design and effectiveness of the methods used (Table 1).

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, supplemented by inductive coding of interview, observation, and documentation data into thematic categories covering implementation, effectiveness, constraints, and organizational support. Within each category, coding frequencies were converted into percentages to indicate the relative weight of each theme across the qualitative dataset; these coding-frequency distributions, rather than survey responses, underlie the visualizations presented in this

article. Data credibility was established through source triangulation, comparing and cross-checking findings across interviews, observation, and documentary evidence (Creswell, 2014).

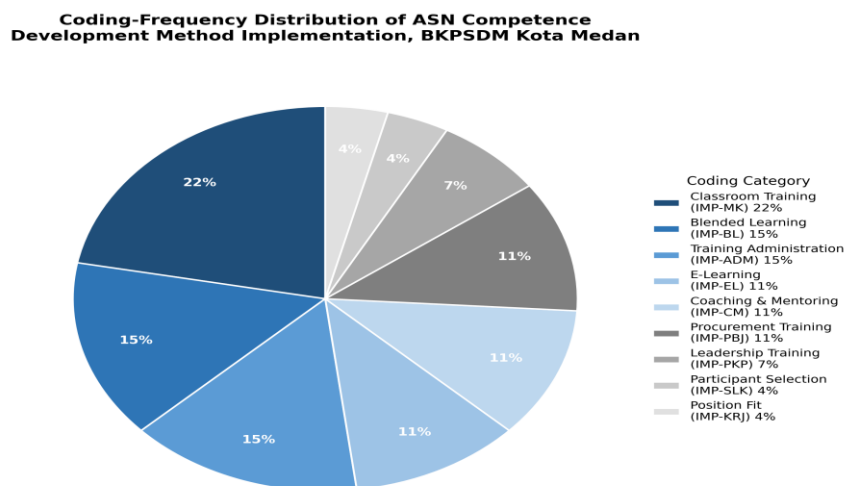
Results and Discussions

The findings are presented in four interrelated themes: (1) the methods used to implement ASN competence development, (2) the effectiveness of those methods, (3) the constraints encountered, and (4) the organizational support that shapes outcomes, followed by a discussion situating these findings within competence, human capital, and good governance theory.

1. Implementation of ASN Competence Development Methods

Coding analysis of the implementation data shows that classroom training (IMP-MK) is the single most dominant method, accounting for 22 percent of implementation-related codes (Figure 1). Informants described classroom training as preferable because it allows direct interaction between participants and resource persons, supporting discussion, material delivery, and ease of evaluation. Blended learning (IMP-BL) and training administration (IMP-ADM) followed at 15 percent each, reflecting BKPSDM's gradual move toward combining face-to-face and digital instruction in response to bureaucratic digital transformation.

E-learning (IMP-EL), coaching and mentoring (IMP-CM), and procurement-related technical training (IMP-PBJ) each accounted for 11 percent of codes, indicating that competence development is no longer confined to formal instruction but increasingly draws on technology-based and workplace social learning. Leadership training (IMP-PKP) accounted for 7 percent, while participant selection (IMP-SLK) and job-competence fit (IMP-KRJ) each accounted for only 4 percenta relatively small share that signals competence development is not yet fully anchored in systematic position-based needs analysis.



Source: Qualitative coding analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data (Saleh, 2026, Figure 4.1); percentages reflect coding frequency, not survey responses.

Figure 1. Coding-frequency distribution of ASN competence development method implementation at BKPSDM Kota Medan

Source: Qualitative coding analysis of interview, observation, and documentation data (Saleh, 2026, Figure 4.1)

These findings are consistent with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) competence theory, in which training is a central instrument for developing both the technical and behavioral dimensions of competence so that employees can perform to job standards, and with the 70:20:10 model of Lombardo and Eichinger (1996), which would predict greater reliance on social and experiential learning than is currently observed. The continued dominance of classroom (formal) learning suggests that, despite incipient digital adoption, BKPSDM Kota Medan has not yet fully operationalized the higher-yield experiential and social learning components that this model identifies as the primary drivers of competence growth.

2. Effectiveness of Competence Development

Effectiveness-related coding shows that the most frequently cited factors are the relevance of training content to job needs (EFE-KS) and participants' level of engagement during training (EFE-FKS), each accounting for 22 percent of effectiveness codes. Informants consistently linked well-matched training content to improved comprehension and easier on-the-job application, echoing Ariani, Rahim, and Permatasari's (2022) finding that ASN competence development must be tailored to each field of work to improve both public service quality and aparatur professionalism.

Improvements in ASN competence (EFE-KM), perceived training benefits (EFE-MN), and certification/post-test outcomes (EFE-SR) each accounted for 11 percent of codes, indicating that training is seen to deliver tangible knowledge gains while also supporting outcome measurement through certification and testing. Performance impact (EFE-KG), material comprehension (EFE-PM), participant interaction (EFE-INT), and field application (EFE-PL) were each coded at only 6 percent, a relatively modest share suggesting that translating training content into day-to-day work practice, and sustaining interactive, two-way learning, remain only partially realized.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan is perceived as moderately effective, consistent with Spencer and Spencer's (1993) view that competence comprises knowledge, skill, and attitude, all three of which informants reported improving to varying degrees through technical, managerial, e-learning, and certification activities though the comparatively low coding share for field application points to a persistent gap between training completion and behavioral transfer to the workplace.

3. Constraints in Competence Development

Constraint-related coding identifies evaluation weakness (KDL-EV) as the most frequently cited obstacle, at 25 percent of constraint codes. Post-training evaluation was described as largely administratively limited to certificates and post-tests without sustained monitoring of how training outcomes are applied at work, a pattern consistent with Choiriyah Basnawi's (2022) observation that weak evaluation and follow-up systems are a recurring weakness in ASN competence development across Indonesia.

Budget limitations (KDL-AG) and weak monitoring (KDL-MV) each accounted for 17 percent of constraint codes. Classroom training in particular requires substantial expenditure on resource persons, facilities, and logistics, constraining how many ASN can participate and how evenly training opportunities are distributed consistent with the view that local fiscal capacity strongly conditions ASN competence development outcomes. Mismatched training content (KDL-MT) accounted for 13 percent, reflecting a continuing gap between position-based competence needs and training design, while time constraints driven by administrative workload (KDL-WK) accounted for 8 percent. Facilities and infrastructure (KDL-SR), weak follow-up (KDL-TL), limited implementation of training

outcomes (KDL-IM/KDL-KRJ), and technical execution issues (KDL-TK) each accounted for 4 percent, suggesting these are present but secondary relative to evaluation, budget, and monitoring constraints.

4. Organizational Support for Competence Development

Organizational-support coding identifies peer support (DKG-RK) and digitalization (DKG-DG) as the most prominent enablers, each at 21 percent. Peer support manifests through knowledge sharing, work discussion, and mutual assistance among ASN in understanding training material and completing administrative tasksevidence that competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan is reinforced through social learning in the workplace, not formal training alone. Leadership support (DKG-PM) and stakeholder involvement (DKG-ST) each accounted for 14 percent; informants linked leadership support to granting training permission, recommending participation, and facilitating ASN learning needs, consistent with Blegur's (2025) finding that organizational leadership commitment significantly influences the success of aparatur competence development.

Organizational policy (DKG-KB), work environment (DKG-LK), ASN motivation (DKG-MT), and career development (DKG-KR) each accounted for 7 percent of organizational-support codes. Although less dominant, these factors remain part of the supporting infrastructure: supportive organizational policy underwrites the implementation of training programs, while a conducive work environment and individual motivation help sustain ASN participation in competence-development activities.

5. Theoretical Discussion

These findings can be further interpreted through four complementary theoretical lenses.

Viewed through Spencer and Spencer's (1993) competence theory, BKPSDM Kota Medan's training programs appear to address all three core dimensions of competenceknowledge, skill, and attitude. Technical and managerial training, e-learning, and certification have contributed to knowledge gains; digital-application and administrative skills have improved through hands-on technical training; and informants reported greater discipline, professionalism, and adaptability as behavioral outcomes of training, consistent with Spencer and Spencer's premise that attitude is a constitutive part of individual competence.

Read against the Lombardo and Eichinger (1996) 70:20:10 model, the persistence of formal (classroom) learning as the dominant method, even as blended and e-learning approaches expand, suggests that Medan's competence-development system has not yet shifted its center of gravity toward the experiential and social learning the model identifies as the most consequential for competence growth. Coaching, mentoring, and peer knowledge-sharing are present, as the coding data show, but are not yet implemented systematically across all local government units.

From the standpoint of Human Capital Theory, BKPSDM's continued investment in technical and managerial training, certification, and e-learning reflects a view of ASN as a strategic organizational asset whose value is enhanced through sustained investment in education and training (Becker, 1993). The presence of budget allocation, leadership backing, and an expanding training menu indicates that this investment logic is already operative in Medan, even though budget constraints currently limit its reach and consistency.

Finally, from a good governance perspective, competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan supports bureaucratic reform by strengthening ASN professionalism, technical capability, and

digital literacy in public service delivery, and by advancing the modernization of training delivery through LMS and hybrid learning. At the same time, the comparatively weak evaluation and monitoring infrastructure identified in this study indicates that the full promise of good governance demonstrable, continuously verified improvements in service quality arising from competence investment has not yet been fully realized.

Conclusion

ASN competence development at BKPSDM Kota Medan remains dominated by classroom training, even as blended learning, e-learning, Zoom-based instruction, Learning Management Systems, and Massive Open Online Courses are increasingly adopted as the agency adapts to bureaucratic digital transformation. The methods used are perceived as reasonably effective in improving ASN technical capability, regulatory understanding, and professionalism, with effectiveness most strongly associated with the relevance of training content to job needs and the engagement of participants during training. Implementation continues to face constraints, most notably underdeveloped post-training evaluation and monitoring, budget limitations, partial mismatches between training content and position requirements, and ASN workload pressures that limit training participation. Organizational support particularly peer-based knowledge sharing, leadership backing, digitalization, and stakeholder involvement plays an important enabling role, and overall, competence development has contributed to improved public service quality and aparatur professionalism, though further strengthening of evaluation, monitoring, position-based training design, and organizational support is needed for these gains to translate into sustained improvement in Medan City Government's performance.

Based on these findings, BKPSDM Kota Medan is encouraged to strengthen post-training evaluation and monitoring systems so that the impact of competence development on ASN performance can be measured beyond post-tests and certification; to expand blended- and e-learning methods as flexible, cost-effective alternatives capable of reaching more participants within existing budget constraints; to align training content more closely with position-based competence needs; to secure greater budgetary support for sustained, equitable competence development across all local government units; and to strengthen organizational learning culture through knowledge sharing, coaching, and mentoring so that competence development draws on workplace experience as well as formal training. Future research is encouraged to examine ASN competence development using quantitative or mixed-methods designs capable of measuring its effect on organizational performance more comprehensively.

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